

ALL THE YEAR ROUND

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"A LEAL LASS."

By RICHARD ASHE KING.

CHAPTER XVIII. FRED'S TRIUMPH.

AS Gower hurried into the house to see Fred, no sacrifice seemed to him too great to make for May's favour; while this sacrifice he was about to make was by no means so great as it appeared.

His father's fury would be frightful if he (Augustus) took upon himself Fred's guilt; but it would be hardly less frightful if he did not take it, and yet insisted upon marrying the forger's sister. Marry May he must—this was a postulate he would not go behind—and his marriage with her being assumed, he had only to weigh against each other his father's fury at his supposed forgery, and his fury at his union with the sister of the felon. Allowing that the wrath he would have to reckon with in the latter case might be the less of the two, still it would most certainly not be so much less as to induce him to forego the credit he would get with May for his magnanimity in taking her brother's guilt upon himself. In fact, the credit was the chief consideration of all, since without it he could hardly hope to win May's hand. And this credit, on which all depended, could be gained at the cost of a few degrees of additional parental fury.

With these considerations clearly and cogently arranged in his mind, Gower made his way upstairs to Fred's room.

Fred, having somewhat recovered from his stupefaction, owing to the hopes he had of the success of May's intervention, started up in bed as Gower entered and looked eagerly in his face.

"I have seen your sister."

"Yes?"

"Well, I'll do it for her; there's nothing I wouldn't do for her."

"But what can you do?" asked Fred, though he knew well what alone could be done to save him.

"I must write to the governor to say it was I who altered the cheque and got you to cash it."

"What a good fellow! Gower, I shall never forget this; never!"

"He'll disinherit me, of course; but it can't be helped."

"Oh, it will blow over," Fred answered almost jauntily.

"What! forgery!" cried Gower, by no means pleased to have his magnanimity minimised. "You would have found that it wouldn't have blown over you, I can tell you; and he'll be ten times more furious with me."

"I didn't mean that it wasn't splendid of you; I never heard of anything so splendid. But I can't bear to think that you should lose so much by it; and if it were not for May, I wouldn't hear of it, I wouldn't indeed; but I declare I thought I had killed her when I told her of it. She fell back fainting, and frightened me out of thinking of myself at all. There never was such a sister!"

"Look here, Beresford; I wish you'd tell her that it's for her I'm doing this. You won't mind, will you?"

"Of course I'll tell her, though she needs no telling. No one in the world would do it for a mere friend."

"I would give anything or do anything, if I could only get her to care for me," Gower cried ardently.

"You could do nothing that she'll think more of than this, for she'd just lay down her life for me."

"You'll say all you can for me to her?"

"I don't think there's the least need for me to say a single word for you to her; but how could I help speaking to her of all I thought of this and of you? I have no one else to speak to about it."

"And if you thought I had the least chance I'd speak to-day to her; I cannot bear the suspense."

Which, according to Fred's interpretation, meant, "I shall write that letter when I am sure of being paid for it—not before."

No doubt, this was in Gower's thoughts; but, besides this, he had in his mind the advisability of striking while the iron was hot.

"All right; only let me see her and sound her, and sing your praises to her first."

When Gower departed under the pretext of composing the fateful letter to his father, but really to allow Fred and May to get again together, Fred turned this suit of his friend to his sister over and over in his mind.

First of all, he promised himself no small advantage, not immediately merely, but prospectively and permanently, from May's engagement to the heir of such an estate as Sir George's—such shooting, hunting, fishing, and good living! Of Gower's disinheritor he felt there was not the least danger. Next he turned to think of May's mind in the matter. Was there the least doubt of her accepting such a match? He could not admit such a doubt. Personally, perhaps, Gower was not the sort of man that a girl like May, or any girl, would fall headlong in love with; but this, after all, was beside the question to Fred's thinking. For, to begin with, he considered marriage to be to a girl what a profession was to a man; and as a man, in spite of some distaste for it, will enter the ministry because his father has a fat living in his gift, or will go to the bar because his father is a solicitor, so a girl marries for position or fortune a man whom she would never marry for love. As, then, Gower in fortune and position was a most brilliant match, May would marry him in spite of his being a muff. Thus Fred argued generally and primarily with much common sense, and not without the warrant of the world. But, again, Gower would now to May's romantic imagination appear no mere commonplace muff, but a hero of chivalry.

Here Fred returned again in thought to the bearings of this match on his own

interests. Sir George, he thought, would certainly relent before his death, yet hardly less certainly would he die before long, for he took no care of a shattered constitution. His place was just the jolliest in the world to stay at, and, as Gower's brother-in-law, he might stay there indefinitely. Then Gower—or May, any way—would supply him with plenty of money when, upon Sir George's death, they came into command of it. Last and least—for Fred never looked a long way ahead, and hated besides the idea of work—Gower might give or get him a post to his taste, an agency, or something of that sort. Besides this, such a marriage would secure Fred absolutely against every possible consequence of his forgery.

Under the influence of such reflections and calculations, Fred's spirits rose surprisingly. What an ass he was to have thought but a few minutes since of throwing up the sponge! Why, he had even meditated suicide—dropping off the wheel of fortune altogether—and now a single swift turn of it brought him from the bottom to the top! For he was already in imagination at the top.

He sprang out of bed buoyantly, dressed himself quickly, and hurried down to breakfast. Here his mother was awaiting him to make much of him in her timid dog-like way—fearful each moment of a repulse. However, Fred was unusually complaisant. Not once throughout the entire meal—though she was unremitting in her loving attentions to him—was he rude to her, a kindness which the poor woman felt inexpressibly.

After breakfast, Fred sought out May and found her in her room.

"May, you've saved me!" he cried, almost before he had entered the room.

"But he said it would be no use to write," May answered, speaking of what her heart was full.

"No use to write! But he's writing now."

It was what she had feared far more than hoped. For the first time she felt that Fred was reckless and selfish.

"Oh, Fred!"

"It's easy to say, 'Oh, Fred!' and look as if I had committed murder," Fred answered in an injured tone. "But what was I to do? You know very well it would just have killed mother and father."

"But there's his father to think of."

"That's a different thing. Besides, he doesn't think of anyone but you. I

declare I never saw a man so much in love."

"I'm so sorry," May cried, saying the commonplace words in a tone of extreme distress.

"Do you mean you dislike him?"

"I like him, of course; but not in that way."

"Oh, well, he can't expect you to be knocked over in a moment like himself; but you'll come to care for him; you couldn't help yourself, he's such a good fellow."

May shook her head.

"May, do you mean there's no hope at all for him?" he asked, in a startled tone.

"I never could come to care for him in that way, Fred; never."

He sank into a chair with a despairing gesture, half-affected and half-sincere.

"That settles it!"

"What do you mean?" she faltered.

"What do I mean! You can't really think that I could let him do this for me now?"

"But he isn't doing it for—for that," she pleaded feebly.

"He's doing it only for you, and if there's no hope at all for him, it would be worse than mean in me to let him do it," he cried magnanimously.

There was a moment or two's silence before poor May ventured to make this timid suggestion. "Fred, don't you think that if Mr. Gower explained everything to his father—how you were driven to do it, I mean—and if he offered for you to return the money, don't you think that Sir George Gower would pass it over?"

"What nonsense, May! He's just an old savage, and all the explanations in the world wouldn't stop him going on with it."

"But if he said something about father—what a death-blow it——"

"Of course you know Sir George better than I do, or than his own son! If there were any other way out of it, do you think Gower would offer to ruin himself for me, or that I should accept the offer?"

"It's such a terrible sacrifice to accept!"

"Good Heavens, May! You drive me mad! Do you think I don't know what a sacrifice it is to accept? Do you think I would accept it, if I had only myself to consider? I would have been out of it all by this if I considered only myself," he added, with a dark significance that chilled her to the very heart.

After a few miserable moments of silence, May cried helplessly: "But what can I do? I cannot help not caring for him."

"You might give him some hope. Of course he doesn't dream of more than that as yet."

"He's been speaking about it to you?"

"He's been raving about you, if you mean that. He can talk of nothing else."

"But how can I be anything to him? He knows me only for a few days; it's a mere passing fancy. Fred cried, do try to put it out of his head," she cried, speaking in breathless and staccato sentences.

"I can put writing that letter out of his head, and I must; but the other is impossible, as you know as well as I do."

"But what can I do?" she cried again, in a tone of desperation.

"I see now that there's nothing for you to do but to break this to father. You can do that," Fred said sullenly.

"Fred, you know I would do anything—anything—to save you, and spare father this; but it isn't in my power to care for him as he wishes, is it, dear?" she cried appealingly.

"That will come—it can't help coming, he's such a good fellow. But now he asks you only not to refuse him."

"But it never will come, never. It isn't right; it isn't fair to him."

"He's the best judge of that himself, I suppose."

"Did he make this the condition of his writing?" May asked ungenerously, driven as she was to bay. She could not, somehow, believe in Gower's magnanimity.

"Did he what?" asked Fred, in a tone of indignant amazement.

"I thought, perhaps, he might have asked you to speak to me," she stammered, very much ashamed of herself.

"He told me that he was doing this for your sake, if you call that making a bargain," he retorted scornfully.

"I oughtn't to have said that; but I didn't mean—I hardly know what I meant."

"It isn't he that makes a condition of this, but I. I couldn't accept such a sacrifice, even for your sake, or mother's, or father's, from a man who was nothing to me. If he were going to be a connection of course it would be different," he said loftily.

But the mere word "connection" was unfortunate, as it helped May to a shuddering realisation of the lifelong relationship pressed upon her.

"I cannot do it, Fred; I cannot indeed," she cried, looking up at her brother with wide, wistful, deprecating eyes.

He stared, as though in stupefaction, at her for a moment, then turned abruptly, and strode from the room. For a minute or two after his departure May stayed in the spot, in the attitude in which he had left her, thinking upon this thing demanded of her. Then her thoughts, taking another and more terrible turn, hurried her headlong from the room, and along the passage to Fred's door.

Here she knocked tremulously twice in quick succession, and, receiving no answer, essayed to turn the handle and enter. But the door was locked on the inside.

"Fred!" she cried frenziedly; "Fred! Fred!" Still there was no answer. "Fred! open! listen! I will do anything you wish. Fred!"

"What?" he cried fiercely at last.

"Let me in. I must speak to you!"

After a few moments, in which she heard him moving across the room and then returning, he strode to the door, turned the key, and flung it open.

"Well?" he asked, with angry impatience.

May's eyes, after a glance at his face, looked across the room to where she had heard him moving a moment before, and there saw lying upon a chest of drawers what she had feared—a revolver. In fact, Fred had just crossed the room to take it from his half-unpacked portmanteau, and to place it conspicuously upon the top of the chest of drawers.

"Oh, Fred!" she sobbed with a piteous kind of dry sob, as she sank into the nearest chair.

She looked so horror-stricken that even Fred felt remorseful. However, he could not afford to lose the advantage which the success of his brutal ruse had given him.

"It's all right; you needn't look as if I had made a ghost of myself," he said.

But she could only stare helplessly up at him, with the dazed look of one half-awakened from a frightful nightmare.

"There; it's all right," he repeated reassuringly, placing his hand gently on her shoulder.

Then she broke down into a wild, semi-hysterical passion of tears, and it was some minutes before she could sob out:

"Fred—promise—promise me never to think of—that again—promise me."

"There, May; I'll promise anything you like. It's all right, I tell you. Come, calm yourself," he said soothingly, stooping as he spoke to kiss her forehead.

Then she put both her arms round his

neck and clung to him, and gasped out between her sobs: "I will do what you want, if he wishes me."

"Dear old May!" he cried in intense relief. "You've saved me and all of us. When I thought of mother and father I was nearly mad."

"And you will promise?"

"There's no need to promise now. Of course, I'll promise," he cried buoyantly.

And then, poor May, reassured, though not a little surprised by this flippant reaction of high spirits, hurried back to her own room to fling herself there upon her knees.

Meanwhile Fred was triumphant, with little or no remorse to chequer his triumph. Had he not bought that revolver in London, when in one of his black moods, against such a moment as this? True, he had no immediate intention of resorting to it, but he might have been driven to resort to it, if Gower broke his promise on learning that May was immovable. After all, what May had imagined might have happened an hour or two later. As for her being victimised, the idea was preposterous. Never again would she have the chance of so brilliant a match; while, as for coming to care for him, of course she would in time, after the manner of women, and once she cared for him she would see no fault in him. On the whole, Fred felt that he was making a handsome and happy provision for May's future.

A CHAT ABOUT CLOTHES.

THERE must be but few people in our northern islands who would welcome sympathetically an "apology for clothes," even were I to write such an essay. To us, dress is nothing less than a second skin. We should die were we deprived of our natural skin. We certainly should not live through many winters were we abruptly compelled to transact the business of life without the clothes which may be called our artificial skin.

To be sure, apologies for clothes have been written ere this. Their authors have penned them in all sincerity, sitting, as Sydney Smith would say, in little else except their bones. Clothes, to them, have seemed sinful vanities and pomps of the flesh, as much deserving of condemnation as luxurious living, and the more positive infractions of the divine commandments. But these consistent anchorites

and ascetics have no right to expect others to fancy their maxims, or to follow their example, unless they can prove that it is comfortable as well as befitting to face the weather unprotected. They, for the most part, lived in delicious climes, where the sun itself was warmer than ten woollen cloaks; and thus, while assuming to preach, they did but advise what was most convenient.

But, it may be said, did not our own lineal ancestors, in this self-same island of Britain, go about, with no great inconvenience to themselves, almost as nude as these Egyptian hermits? If they were able thus to withstand the cold of winter, why should not we also be able?

Now, I opine that our ideas about the early Britons are largely romantic, and therefore unveracious. We think of them, when we have time to devote to such unprofitable musing, as the Romans, who fought with them, have sketched them for all time. They were bronzed, massy-shouldered, long-haired individuals, wearing nothing but a girth band: and thus they fought with the armoured soldiers of Augustus and his successors.

It must be remembered, however, that the natives always terminated a campaign when the warm weather came to an end. They then went into winter quarters; and expected to see and hear nothing more about their enemies until the spring was well forward. How should the Romans know, therefore, what extra clothing the ancient Britons put on when the early frosts of October began to chill their bones? No doubt, in truth, these shaggy barbarians, men and women alike, clad themselves in as many sheep and calfskins as they could well carry during the cold months: and thus sufficiently justify us, their posterity, for our habitual use of clothes.

"It has been said that the body is the garment of the soul. Whether this be, or be not, merely a graceful metaphor, we might well somewhat expand it. Without the costume of the body, what individuality would our various souls possess—if we can imagine them primarily gifted with a sphere of existence like ours?" We should be little more enlivening as a human spectacle than a crowd of common hens' eggs. Similarly, were we all to live without the embellishment of dress, how tired the more innately æsthetic of us would infallibly become of the monotonous flesh tint, which would, of course, be the main colour of our personalities! Hence, just as the

original germ of our life is rendered distinctly more interesting to the eye in its garment of the body, so also the body itself gains new attractions by the garments with which convention and necessity have endued it. I dare say to one removed from our earth and well situated outside our solar system, an expansion of this simile would be possible. He would be able to discuss the different planets in their different garb of different atmospheres, even as we can discuss ourselves, our cotton gowns, and our calf-skin boots.

Of course, it is a moot question how far our health is affected by a complete surrender to fashion in the matter of the bulk of clothes which we wear. Who of us does not know this or that octogenarian who is fond of boasting that he has never worn an overcoat in his life?—his longevity is inevitably attributed to this fact. After all, however, it is but a feeble little vaunt. Why, if the principle be once accepted, did not the old man, in his younger days, gradually discard his other clothes also? He would then have dispensed with tailors and tailors' bills. But is it not probable that Fate would have balanced his scales for him in some other way? By his uncommon abstinence in coats and trousers, might he not have acquired so robust an appetite that the money, which hitherto was wont to go in garments, would have been claimed by the butcher and the baker? Clearly, in such a case—no unlikely case, either—it were more becoming to dress like the rest of the world, than to eat like two or three common men put together.

That gentle wit, Montaigne, in one of his essays, remarks: "I know not who it was that asked a beggar whom he saw in his shirt, in the depth of winter, as brisk as another muffled up to the ears in furs, how he could endure to go about so. 'Why, sir,' said he; 'you go with your face bare, but I am all face.'" It was a perception of this reference, and a sense of humiliation at seeing so many small Frenchmen, "whom he could have thrown down with a breath," walking without their hats, that made Horace Walpole systematically harden himself by exposure. He used to go on to his lawn at Twickenham, when the dew was thick, wearing a thin pair of slippers on his feet and nothing on his head. At the outset, this temptation of the demon, which the French were accustomed to call "le catch-cold," brought him a severe feverish influenza. But, when he

had conquered this, he was a privileged man for the rest of his long lifetime. "Draughts of air, damp rooms, windows open at his back, all situations in short, were alike to him." If one of his guests troubled because he seemed wilfully to expose himself to the weather, he would somewhat pettishly inform them: "My back is the same with my face, and my neck is like my nose." To this hardening process, and his habit of drinking iced water, the luxurious "dilettante," in great measure, attributed his eighty years of agreeable life. It would be interesting, as some sort of confirmation to Walpole's opinion, to get statistical information about the after life of our Bluecoat boys. Do they, as a rule, suffer from colds when they take up the common fashion of hat-wearing after they leave Newgate Street? And do any of them, later in life, abandon this vicious indulgence, and return to the lusty custom of their youth, with profit to their health as well as their purse?

Having already sufficiently admitted that it is on the whole beneficial for us to wear clothing, it would be curious to trace the history of apparel from its very beginning. Our philosophic naturalists talk much about their theory of the evolution of the human race from very low antecedents, and in the construction of their system are at a loss for at least one very important link. Why should we not in the same way deduce the evolution of fashion from the single girth band of early man? Which came first into court, the head or the feet? And how long a time elapsed between the establishment of the custom of wearing a feather in the hair and a bone through the gristle of the nose, and the serious step of the conception of primeval shirt? Had climate or the inborn vanity of human beings the more concern in the dissemination of those thin first rudiments of fashion, which have, in our day, developed into the myriad of drapers, haberdashers, hatters, hosiers, and bootmakers' shops which we so naively accept as essential to our existence?

These are knotty questions which may be solved in volumes, not in a single essay. It is probable, however, that our forefathers received no small stimulus to their desire for decoration from the sight of the various plumage, dainty fur coats, etc., of the other wild denizens of their woods and forests. Imagine the train of ideas which might perplex a thick-headed aborigine in the depths of Brazil while he stood under a

gigantic tree contemplating the gorgeous adornments of a bird of Paradise. The bird was to him but a weak creature in a fine dress. Why should he not kill it and deck himself in its feathers? The deed done, one may conceive with what anxiety he either stole to the placid waters of the nearest lake and looked at his reflection, or strutted off to his miserable wigwam to ask his wife what she thought of him in his new shape. Perhaps, indeed, some such innovator by his sudden apparition to strangers in these remote solitudes, became the prototype of those eccentric, much befeathered divinities whom the Central Americans used to worship in effigy amid ghoulis sacrifices.

One can fancy how rapturously a weak chieftain in a barbarous community would welcome the institution of dress, even in its earliest stage, as a means of indicating his superiority. Hence, too, the sumptuary laws of our own land in those pre-Reformation days, when "dress was the symbol of rank." How emphatic the distinction between a baron of the fourteenth century, "dressed in authority," and his spiritless half nude velleins! It is an old saying that a man well dressed is twice a man. Neither in such times, when the coat marks the rank, nor now when all fashion bows to the democratic broadcloths, can it be genuinely confessed that

'Tis better to be lowly born!

Clothes serve many purposes nowadays. Whatever their original meaning, in these days they are worn often less from vanity or as a source of warmth than as a decoy. Like conversation, according to Talleyrand, they rather conceal than advertise the circumstances of their wearer. The man who, three centuries ago, had he then lived, would have been magnificent in puffed breeches of silk and satin, in the Victorian era, leaves the profusion of jewellery and dazzling neckties, which have come to be held as a mark of wealth, to fishmongers and publicans in holiday attire.

Through tatter'd clothes small vices do appear;
Robes and furr'd gowns hide all. Plate sin with gold,
And the strong lance of justice hurtless breaks:
Arm it in rags, a pigmy's straw doth pierce it.

So it was, no doubt, when poor old King Lear uttered his wail, and the moral of his words is, of course, as good now as it was then.

Thus, in effect, clothes may be said to

increase the complexity of social intercourse. If we could associate one with another, as soul with soul, divested of the distractions of flesh and bones, this would be ideal society. The incumbance of a body has, however, to be accepted, and the little cases and peculiarities of the body much obstruct the free communion of soul with soul. Moreover, the body hides the soul, sometimes very completely; so that intercourse between two individuals who, as mere souls, would have had not a word to say to each other, may be carried on in a manner wholly artificial and strained, and, therefore, unprofitable. But, add to this, the confusion of real personalities which dress also introduces, and it is often vain in the extreme for a man to ask himself, "who's who!" We are in a double wrapping of unreality, and many of us spend a lifetime in futile seeking for true congenial spirits. The habit of disguise is thrust on us by nature and our ancestors, and we pay the penalty for all. No wonder the philosopher, who condescends to discuss the subject of clothing, finds language halt in the expression of his intense irony towards coats and their wearers in general.

Nevertheless, it seems a pity that so many honest people have wasted good indignation upon a theme which is, after all, innocent in comparison with others. Take the following verse from a clever series of stanzas, all equally harsh:

If there's one cause
Beyond other that draws
My utmost scorn and loathing,
'Tis the fuss fools make,
And the pains they take,
About their outward clothing.

Surely, since we are now obliged to be clothed, it is well to be particular how we are clothed. The maxim which reminds us that "appearances are deceitful," is on all tongues; but few of us are able to remember it on the rare occasions when such remembrance might have been of use to us. And if it be true—as no doubt it is—"that a stranger of tolerable sense, dressed like a gentleman, will be better received by those of quality above him, than one of much better parts whose dress is regulated by the rigid notions of frugality," this may, at least, be a lesson to us to take pains about our outward clothing, while, at the same time, we must be ready to discern the worth that often underlies a shabby dress or a threadbare coat.

A KNOT CUT.

A STORY IN FOUR CHAPTERS. CHAPTER I.

A WOMAN stood for a moment on the landing, looking down at the crowd, which the two policemen at the head of the staircase were driving back. Men, women, and even children, were surging up the narrow staircase, inspired by a morbid curiosity to try and get a glimpse of that attic door, which shut in the dreadful spectacle of murder.

A man lay in that room, stabbed through the heart. It was the ghastly stream of his blood, spilt by his brother man, trickling sluggishly beneath the doorway, which had first drawn attention to his end.

Hoarse voices speculated as to the cause and time of the crime. The police were besieged with questions, which they could not answer, though they put on a wise, impenetrable, superior kind of air, as if they could say much on the subject if they only cared to do so.

The door of the house had stood open most of that day, for there were workmen about it, doing repairs after the dilatory, happy-go-lucky fashion in which poor people's houses are generally treated. The murderer must have come and gone, with the people, who were coming and going all day long, in that overcrowded tenement.

The winter day was short. The dusk of a November evening set in soon, and the fog and the drizzling rain had made the twilight darker. He had probably come as the afternoon was closing in; one of the many children in the house had heard the murdered man singing in his room at his dinner-hour. Public indignation was all the greater, because the man had been a universal favourite.

The woman standing on the landing heard all this discussed. She had heard it discussed by the crowd outside, standing staring up at the house as if its dreadful secret were written on its walls. She had heard every possible theory as to the murderer and his motive suggested, as she forced her way up the staircase; everybody, who recognised her as "the young woman who lived in the next attic" to that occupied by the dead man, called out to her what had happened.

She had been away all day at her work, and only learned the news on her return. The police let her pass when she told them that she lived up there. She stopped on

the landing and looked down at the excited, upturned faces. One man, one of the foremost in the crowd, a slightly-built, quiet-faced young man, dressed like a respectable workman, who had not added any theory to all those eagerly propounded about him, but had stood with his hands in his pockets, apathetically staring at the guarded door, looked up with a curious, sudden swiftness as she looked down.

As it happened, her eyes, with a suppressed, expectant watchfulness of vision, taking in the whole of those upturned faces, were resting really on his. Perhaps it was rather her other senses which were conveying to her mind the consciousness of that eager, vengeance-excited crowd of men and women; and she only saw, in reality, that one pale, quiet face. For, as their eyes met—a sudden shock like that of an electric current flowing from him to her—set her quivering with a fear and a repulsion, and she suddenly cared nothing for the rest of that crowd. They might have been puppets in some mimic show. They were nothing. It was only this one man, with that strange, terrible keenness of vision, against whom she had to guard.

She turned and went into her room, shutting to the door upon her.

"Who is that?" asked the workman of the policeman.

"Janet Malone, sempstress."

CHAPTER II.

IT was three weeks after the murder. Life in 108, Trevorton Street, had gone back into its usual routine. The murder was still a mystery; but the dead man had been buried. The police no longer haunted the street. Even the murdered man's room had a new lodger. The young workman, whom Janet Malone had noticed, had taken the room. As yet, few in the house had seen him, and still fewer had exchanged any words with him. People looked rather askance at him for taking such a lodging, at least, so soon after the tragedy. But he showed himself rather taciturn and reserved to his new neighbours, and quite indifferent to their opinions. His work was irregular, or else he was lazy, for he went in and out in a desultory fashion; sometimes spending the whole day in his room, and only going out late in the evening, returning when all the respectable occupants of the house were in bed. On other days he would go out early, and be away all day. If everybody in that

house had not been too much engaged in solving the problem of existence to notice it, they might have discovered that his restless, indifferent air was but a cloak to the most intense watchfulness. When he was alone that listlessness would fall from him, and every movement would betray an alert decision which boded ill for the person who had been deceived by his appearance of languor, and his eyes would brighten into that keenness of vision which had so terrified Janet Malone.

She had not met him again. She did not even know that he had taken the room next to hers. She made the discovery one day, about ten days after he had been in the house. She recognised him at once. Indeed, his face, with its quiet, vigilant power, had haunted her since the day of the murder.

The workmen had left their work in the house half-finished. One of the repairs to which they had had to attend, was the chimney in her room. Some days, according to the wind, the smoke, instead of going up, poured down into the room in a manner almost intolerable. She had made endless complaints to the agent of the landlord, but nothing had been done, and now the workmen had once more gone away without rectifying the chimney. This evening, when she came home from her work and lighted her fire, the smoke was worse than ever. Half-suffocated, she flung open her door, and stepped out into the landing. At the same moment—so close upon it, that it almost seemed as if the opening of her door had been the signal for him to open his—the young workman appeared in his doorway. Janet recognised him through the wreaths of smoke rolling up between them. She shrank back, under the shock of his unexpected presence.

"Is your room on fire?" he asked.

"What a smoke!"

"No." She had recovered herself. "It is my chimney."

She laughed, but shivered at the same moment, as if with cold. He knew that it was not physical cold that had made her shudder; but he glanced up at the open trap-door overhead. It was left open to allow the smoke from her room to escape. Through it could be seen the broken roof, from which the rain was dropping to the landing where they stood.

His face blackened.

"It's infamous! The house isn't fit for a dog."

"The landlord apparently thinks it is fit for human beings," she said, bitterly. And then, in a kinder tone, "I am afraid you find that open trap-door disagreeable. But I am obliged to have it open, or we should be suffocated with the smoke."

"Oh! I don't mind. But you—you must have been perished these last bitter days."

She made an impatient movement.

"One gets used to everything."

"Philosophy!" He laughed, wondering again as he had so often wondered during the past fortnight when he had secretly watched her comings and goings, and listened to her voice, how it happened that a woman of such refinement should be living in her position. He had been educated in a different position himself, and knew that these rough work-people about her were not of her order. "Let me come in and look at your chimney," he added. "I am a Jack of all trades."

She hesitated a second, then without speaking led the way into her room. He followed. The room was full of smoke, and just as they entered a violent gust of wind brought down an avalanche of soot and rubbish on the fire, extinguishing the feeble flames which were already almost succumbing to adverse circumstances. With a dismayed cry, they both rushed to the fireplace. He insisted upon clearing up the place for her, and they grew quite sociable as they laughed and talked over the catastrophe in her exquisitely clean and neat room.

When some sort of order was re-established, he would take no denial to his request, that she should come in and have a cup of tea by his fire. She yielded at last. She was cold and tired, and had come home from her work, with all a woman's longing for a cup of tea. The boiling of her own kettle looked hopeless, and he had been very kind. Yet it cost her a terrible effort to cross the threshold of that room. Though he talked away cheerfully, and did not seem to look at her, he saw the faint shuddering hesitation in the doorway. He put her a chair near the fire, and making his tea, poured her out a cup and cut her some bread and butter. She sat leaning back in her chair watching him. It was long since she had been waited on like this. It took her back to old days when——

She relentlessly drove back the thought. She was a workwoman now. He sat

at the table drinking his own tea, and talking sensibly and pleasantly upon various topics; but he was gradually leading up to one.

"Yes, one might really think poverty a crime, it takes a man into such strange places. For instance, my coming to this room. It is not pleasant exactly, but the landlord has taken off a little of the rent owing to the recent event; and dead men don't trouble the living. And you too—you have not felt it necessary to change your room?"

"As you say, poor people cannot always follow their fancies."

"You are sensible. Why should you go to the expense and bother of moving? The dead man is at peace. So apparently is his murderer! I wonder what the police are about."

"The police, like a good many other people, may make a wrong start to begin with; and each step naturally only leads them farther from their goal."

"You mean that they may base their conclusions on an error," he said abstractedly.

"The first thing is, doubtless, to find out the right motive for the crime," he went on. "In the case of this Patrick O'Connor it was certainly not robbery; it was probably personal revenge."

"Probably, as the murderer took nothing."

"Or there are such things as secret societies; for this man, from all accounts, could scarcely have had a personal enemy. He may have failed the society he belonged to, and was therefore marked out for vengeance."

She answered him quietly, her manner being perfectly self-possessed. But he saw by her eyes that he was torturing her. They were the windows of her soul, which was rebelling, fluttering, crying out against his merciless treatment. He had seen enough—for the present—and he let her go. He turned the conversation. She talked a few moments more, and then rose.

He rose, too, and, as he bid her good-bye, a sudden discovery he made, fell on him like a shock. She was a beautiful woman. Up to this moment, he had seen in her only a tired, haggard-faced woman, with heavy eyes and pale lips.

Now, though she was outwardly so quiet, her cheeks and lips were tinged with a crimson of intense excitement, and her eyes were brilliant with that same suppressed pain and fear. The manhood in

him was suddenly stirred to its foundations by her beautiful, suffering womanhood.

"I was right," he said, as he stood alone staring into his fire. "She knows all about it. It was a wise thing coming here. She has some motive, too, for staying in the house; that motive may guide me to the plans of the murderer."

Nothing showed more clearly how powerfully she had moved him, than the fact that his previous suspicion that she had been an accomplice in the deed had completely vanished. The murder had only been known to her after it was done; of that he was now certain. She must be shielding some one through affection, or fear; she, too, might be a member of that secret society to which he had already found out the murdered man belonged.

CHAPTER III.

THAT evening began an acquaintance which continued. Janet tried hard, at first, to break it off; but she yielded, at last, to the gentle, but irresistible, persistence he brought to bear on her. There were moments when she became conscious of this quiet but relentless will which had mastered her own, in this simple matter of acquaintanceship, and then she was filled with fear, and rebelled against it, only to succumb again to the charm she really found in his society.

These moments of anger and revolt became rarer as the days went on. After all, it was pleasant to have a companion to whom she could talk as to an equal. For he, too, she was certain, came from a different class to that surrounding him. He was educated, clever, refined; but, as she kept her past to herself, so did he his, and they were both contented to take the present, as it was.

He had fallen into a way of almost daily meeting her, as she came home from her work, and not a day passed without their exchanging greetings and seeing each other for, at least, a few moments, either in the house or streets.

Her old fear of him vanished, and, day by day, some subtle sympathy, to be felt but not expressed, drew them closer to each other. It was such a relief to her loneliness. How lonely she had been during the last few years she did not know till she felt what this companion was to her now. It was such a relief to that gnawing, horrible

fear of anticipation which had haunted her solitude, ever since the day of the murder. Every moment might bring to her what she dreaded, with such dreadful, shrinking repulsion. She was terrified at being alone.

This simple, pleasant, frank friendship between her and Mark Grey was a very haven of refuge and peace from her own unrestful loneliness, and that thing which she dreaded. But it was coming near her, very near; and as she walked and talked with this man, she little knew that it was he who, in another life to the one he showed to her, was ruthlessly driving it on.

She had once asked him what his work was. But he had evaded her question. He had a curious and growing dislike now to meet her eyes after he had deceived her in an answer. She thought he worked too hard, for he seemed as she talked to him one afternoon, about a month after she had known him, to have grown paler and thinner, while at moments his face had a harassed look. She made some remark about it. He answered her in a constrained and rather cold manner. For the next three days she saw nothing of him. He did not even sleep in the house. It was at the end of these three days that she discovered by the loneliness caused by his absence, how pleasant their companionship had been. She came home that third evening, feeling the old weary listlessness and indifference of life; but as she turned the handle of her door all that was swept away, in the great and shuddering horror that fell upon her. That which she had dreaded, had come. Her door was locked on the inside. She had never fastened it since the day of the murder, on the morning of which she had accidentally left it unlocked. Since then, she had always left it unfastened, so that the room might be a refuge in case some miserable hunted fugitive from justice, might fly there. There had been no pity in her action. Pity was turned into hate, and lay cold at her heart as the murdered love which had once been between her and that fugitive. It was a mere sense of moral obligation. She was bound to this fugitive by hated fetters, but she was bound, and she was compelled to help him.

"It is I," she breathed rather than spoke.

The door was opened, and she faced a tall, powerfully-built man, whose face and figure were so terribly worn by hunger,

need, desperation, exhaustion, that for a second she scarcely recognised him, and stood gazing at him. He pulled her into the room with a fierce, hunted look in his eyes, and closed and locked the door again.

"Why have you come here?" she gasped in a low, hoarse voice. "When——"

He laughed a harsh sinister laugh.

"So you found out that I had been there! Well, he was a traitor!"

"Oh, the wickedness of it! He was an honest, happy, hard-working man; his only crime that he had once been one of yours."

"Look here!" with a savage, cruel threatening in his eyes. "Don't talk of what you don't understand! Get me food and let me rest. I have been hunted down like a wild beast since that day. The police, curse them, have been on my track ever since. I could not get out of the country. I have gone without food, shelter, warmth. But I have given them the slip. They will hardly think I have doubled back here. How did you know that I was here that day?"

"When I came home I found that I had left my door unfastened, and when I came in I saw the red marks of fingers on the box where my money was kept. The money was gone. Only you knew the secret of the lock; besides, I knew you had a personal grudge against——"

"Curse you! He was a traitor! Give me something to eat. I have starved for two days."

She prepared a meal for him, and he sat down and ate it wolfishly. She could not even pity him for the awful hunger he must have felt to eat like that. She began to be afraid of the hate in her heart. She felt sick with it. To see him sitting there in her room, which she had kept unpolluted from his presence for three years, filled her with a desperate, wild loathing and rage. She could not look at him, speak to him.

By-and-by, when the food, and warmth, and rest had strengthened him a little, and he could think of other things beside his own desperate, hunted self, he looked at her, and something maliciously amused, and yet cruel and angry, leapt into his eyes.

"You aren't pleased to see me," he said, with a laugh. "It isn't dutiful," and he flung out his arm as she passed him and caught her to him.

"How dare you!" She had wrenched

herself free and caught up a knife from the table at the same moment. "If you touch me—speak to me—I will stab you to the heart."

He was cowed by the splendour of her passion, her anger, and he fell back sullen, enraged; but remembering that he was for the moment in her power, he cursed her under his breath, and then flung himself down on the bed to sleep.

She could scarcely breathe in the same atmosphere as he did, and yet she did not dare leave the room. Suppose Mark Grey came and found him there.

The quick, light footsteps she knew so well came running up the staircase outside her room. Before her tortured brain could think what she must do, they stopped at her door. There was a quick, eager tapping on it. She sprang to her feet, and ran to it, opened it, and passed out on to the landing, closing it swiftly behind her.

Mark Grey stood there waiting for her. Some powerful feeling stirring him, touched her, and she knew before he had spoken that this was not the Mark Grey she had hitherto known. But she had no time to wonder what the change was. He caught her hands in his. She felt them burning her.

"It seems so long since I have seen you, Janet. May I call you Janet——?"

"Hush!" she whispered in a sharp voice that pierced her own ears, "you must not speak so loudly. My husband is in there asleep——"

"Your husband!" His burning hands went suddenly cold as death, and their chill struck to her heart. "Your husband, Janet?"

"Yes. Her husband!" The door of the room was flung open, and Joseph Malone stood in the light falling from the room on to the dark landing, his eyes ablaze with jealousy and fury.

"So this is why you would not kiss me! You——"

"Hush! Joseph! Oh, hush!" She pressed her hand against his lips to check the foul words upon them. "Go back, unless you wish to kill me."

But he stood for a second like a man turned suddenly to stone. The light from the room fell full on the white, set face of the other man, and as the mist of fury cleared from Malone's eyes, he saw that face plainly for the first time. He drew back instinctively into the room, and she followed, swiftly shutting the door between them and Mark Grey.

"Why did you risk so much by showing——?" she began and then stopped, terrified by the look on his face.

"You vile traitor!" he hissed, "to sell me to the police. Don't pretend you don't understand, or I will choke the lie in your throat. That is Jermyn, the detective, who has been hunting me down like a bloodhound. But I will——"

He pulled out a revolver from his breast. But, with a cry, she sprang between him and the door.

"He shall not touch you! You are my husband! And——"

She was out of the room before she had finished her sentence. She heard steps a little heavy and uncertain, descending the staircase, and she ran down to overtake them.

CHAPTER IV.

MARK JERMYN had no distinct consciousness of going out of the house into the street. He had come to see her that night because the love which had grown up in his heart for her had overmastered him at last. Three days before he had been on the verge of betraying himself. But he had conquered. He must succeed first in the task set him to do, of hunting down not only a murderer but a traitor.

Some other thought, too, governed him. He knew that she had some interest in the man he was bringing to justice—not the interest of love. He, with wonderful keenness of perception, both natural and trained, had discovered that this murderer was an abhorrence to her. But still she shielded him. And a sense of honour and delicacy intensely strong, in spite of the profession he followed, forbade his trying to win her love till he could first show himself in his natural colours. He had remembered that another day or two must bring his task to its end. The net, which not only caught this red-handed fugitive from justice, but a gang of evil confederates, was closing in on them. This very night his plans were to be put into execution. It would be a proceeding of no little peril, and he had come to have one last look at her in case——

And now when he had thought his quarry secure in a totally different quarter of London, he found him in the very house where—— All the mortification of his baffled plans—and it would have been cruel enough at another time—was swallowed up in the greater passions

rending his heart. This man—this murderer, round whose neck he had with such matchless skill and patience been twisting a halter—was her husband! And he had not even known that any man had called her wife! He stood outside, gazing across the street, his eyes dark, and burning with suffering, jealousy, bitterness.

Why had she not told him?

"Mark!" She stood by his side. For the first time she used his Christian name. The name by which she had hitherto called him was not his; and she could not use this other, which showed him to be the dead man's avenger. He did not stir nor speak, and she laid her hand on his arm. "Mark," she said again, "I never told you because I was so ashamed that such a man had called me wife. We were married seven years ago. I was a girl then—only eighteen—foolish, ignorant, romantic. I met him in America; he was over there posing as a martyr for his country—Ireland. He was eloquent, enthusiastic about the bitter wrongs of his country and people, and I believed him." Her voice broke into a more passionate note, but she quelled it. "I believed that he was a brave patriot, who had given his all for his country, and was being shamefully persecuted by its oppressors. I married him, and found him to be a liar—rapacious, revengeful, cruel! Instead of having given up all for his country, he was growing rich out of the poor and ignorant who trusted him. I learned to hate, despise, and fear him. After a time I left him, and have lived as you know how. And now to add to his crimes he has committed this last most dreadful one of all—and still I come to you to plead for his life, though he has been the anguish of mine."

She knew the man to whom she was pleading; some desperate, dumb fear of herself guided her to the knowledge. If she could plead for that miserable wretch, he could crush his own feelings and listen. It was no time for love; and yet she knew that he loved her as she loved him. But between them this unspoken love lay like a naked sword, commanding their faith and purity. And she could see but one way to obey that command—to spare the man who kept their lives apart. He understood her. But his mind refused to submit, because of another element warring in it.

There was love! If he let this man escape, he lost his love. Fear! For if he laid his hand on this man, might it not be

a treacherous revenge for the love he was losing? But amid this tumult of heart-voices, another spoke, and it grew louder and clearer. Duty! If he let this man go, he was a traitor himself. He had had his orders. Till to-night he had obeyed such orders as an honourable man should. Yet if he obeyed to-night, would not she turn from him as a coward who had sacrificed this rival for the sake of his love? She could not see this duty. She was arguing desperately against their love to save their honour. But there was this other call—

And then suddenly, all fear of her misunderstanding him vanished. The clouds of stormy passion cleared from his brain. He had always made duty a plain path to his feet. And now in this moment of his supreme ordeal, the simple rectitude of his life saved him.

"Janet," he said quietly, though his voice was fainter for the storm that had shaken him, "I cannot do what you ask."

She fell back against the railing, clasping it with her hand to steady herself. All hesitation gone now, he ran up the steps leading to the house door. It was ajar as she had left it. Though the scene might have taken an age if measured by the passion of it, it had in reality passed in a few seconds. But now that he was acting again, every second lost seemed precious as an hour. What, if his quarry had escaped? He ran upstairs with swift, light feet, drawing his revolver as he went. The man was powerfully built and desperate. If he had met any men on his way upstairs, he would have told them to guard the door and the windows in case—but only a woman came out of one of the rooms as he passed, and he had no time to stay and seek help. He must grapple with the murderer alone. His only fear now was, that he had escaped by the back of the house.

Oh! Why had he lost even those few seconds? He reached the landing—there was no sound from the closed door of Janet's room.

He tried the handle. It was locked on the inside, for, bending swiftly to look, he saw the key showing dark against the light in the room.

With a mighty effort, he flung himself with his whole force against the door. The frail lock gave way, and bursting open the door, Jermyn sprang into the room. To see that Joseph Malone had escaped. The room was as he had always seen it,

when, in passing, he had caught a glimpse into its purity of neatness and cleanness. The only disorder were the remains of that supper left on the table, and the disarranged coverlet, upon which the murderer had flung himself mud-stained, weary, sullen, and full of hate of the woman who had done her best to save him. And he lay now across her hearth, beyond the reach of justice as of human help, done to death by his own desperate, despairing hand. This was his last way of escape from the halter already closing round his neck. Patrick O'Connor was avenged, and a problem of love and life solved.

BUCKINGHAM PALACE.

THE doings of Kings, and Queens, and Royal persons generally, are the subject of a good deal of very laudable curiosity. How they live, and where they live, is a subject of never-ending interest to people who otherwise have but little concern with them. Why should we not be interested about those who have for ages exercised, and will continue to exercise, so much influence over human affairs? And with the Monarch in popular imagination is firmly connected the Palace, which is the Monarch's usual residence. Mention Louis the Fourteenth, and the Palace of Versailles rises pictured in the mind's eye—its magnificence and its meanness, the gilded saloons, the frowsy garrets, the parks, the fountains, and the muddy roads, where the Royal carriage sticks in the mire. With the Monarchy of Prussia one always connects Potsdam—solid, rigid, and in the view of all the world. And can we imagine the Hapsburgs without their Schönbrunnen, or the Brunswicks apart from Herrenhausen, or the Dutch Royalties without The Hague? In the same way for the first half of Her Majesty's reign, Buckingham Palace and Queen Victoria were indissolubly associated in people's minds.

And the life that gathered about the Palace was one in which the multitude might share. Country people hung about the railings to get a peep at Majesty, and were quite disappointed, and even indignant, if told that the Queen was elsewhere. And all the season through the Royal standard floated almost continually from its tall staff. And the Palace, too, seemed to share in what there was of weal or woe that was current in the world. Past the Palace filed the ponderous

funeral train of the great Duke of Wellington. And witness that "bleak March day" in 1854, when the Guards mustered, and marched past the Palace on their way to the Crimea, while the Queen and Prince Consort watched them from the balcony. The March day was in February, and we have "Her Majesty's own words," written in her diary, to the effect that the day was not bleak. "We stood on the balcony to see them," writes the Queen, "the morning fine, the sun shining over the Towers of Westminster." But that is a picture, too, to abide in the memory. And then there was the marriage of "Unser Fritz" and our own eldest daughter—England's eldest daughter. And don't we remember the scene outside the Palace that day; and how we clung to the railings and frantically cheered the newly-married pair? And so without further ado let us make the Palace the subject of a visit and a paper. First, as to how it came there, and how it got its name.

In the second year of his reign, George the Third, who found the Palace of Saint James's not to his taste as a residence, purchased the mansion known as Buckingham House, "dull, dowdy, and decent—a large, respectable-looking, red-brick house," as it is described by a writer of the period. The original builder of the house was John Sheffield, Duke of Buckinghamshire and Normanby, and he had acquired the site by purchase in 1703, when the earlier building, known as Arlington, and before that as Goring House, which formerly stood there, had been pulled down. The site itself seems originally to have formed part of St. James's Park, and in the reign of James the First was planted with mulberry trees, and became known as the Mulberry Gardens.

A princely palace on that space does rise
Where Sedley's noble muse found mulberries.

The allusion being to a play of Sir Charles Sedley, bearing the title of the Mulberry Garden, the scene of which is on this very spot.

These Mulberry Gardens—there was another in Clerkenwell, on the site of the House of Detention—formed part of a project conceived by James the First, for introducing the culture of silkworms and the manufacture of silk into England. The mulberry trees were designed to afford food for the silkworms, and mulberries and silkworms together were placed under the charge of an official keeper, and

in 1629 we find Walter, Lord Ashton, in possession of the office, with a salary and official residence, all his rights in which he sold to Lord George Goring who gave his name to the original Goring House. During the Civil Wars the place shared the fate of the other Royal parks, and was sold to private hands; but the Mulberry Gardens continued open as a place of resort during the Commonwealth, and John Evelyn, in 1656, describes a visit to the gardens—then almost the only place of amusement open to the Londoners.

With the Restoration came back the Gorings to their rights, which were disposed of presently to Lord Arlington, who called the house after his own name. Besides being one of the Cabal, his lordship is notable as having "in the year of the great Plague brought from Holland the first pound of tea imported into England." And thus the house which may be said to have been founded by silkworms, was also, probably, consecrated by the first libations of tea poured out in these realms. The Mulberry Gardens, still in full swing, were not, however, converted all of a sudden into tea-gardens. Pepys visits them and finds them not to his liking; but a second visit, with more cheerful friends to eat a Spanish "olio," makes amends, and the whole party are mighty merry over their fare. Nor must we "forget the mulberry tarts which Dryden loved," the attractions of which and of the company of fair dames, often brought the poet to the Mulberry Gardens.

But when my Lord of Buckingham comes into possession, we hear nothing more of the Mulberry Gardens, which seem to have been absorbed in the more extensive entourage of the new mansion. As the man who gave his name to the now Royal Palace—a name already historical, and so familiar to the ear that people rarely question whence it comes—as the sponsor, then, of this Royal abode, John Sheffield, Duke of Buckingham, requires a short notice. As a poet, soldier, courtier, statesman, the friend of Dryden, and the boon companion of King Charles, the Duke was a notable figure in his time. Fighting the Dutch in the great naval battle of Solebay; Gentleman of the Bed-chamber to Charles the Second; Governor of Hull; Colonel of the old Holland Regiment; Governor of Tangier, whither he sailed in command of a large force; Lord Chamberlain at the Court of James the Second; he proved himself a many-sided man, with a higher opinion of

his own deserts than general estimation allowed. People called him Lord Allpride; and, perhaps, it was with some notion of slighted merit that caused him to espouse the cause of the Revolution, and become a "persona grata" at the Court of William and Mary.

"Pro Rege sæpe, pro Republica semper," is the proud, but not unworthy motto, that heads the epitaph on his stately tomb in Westminster Abbey. Anyhow, whatever his leading motives, he was made Marquis and Duke by the new monarchs. The Duke married, for his third wife, Catherine Darnley, daughter of James the Second by Catherine Sedley, and this was the "Princess Buckingham" of Horace Walpole's time, whose pride was as notable as her husband's, as she always exacted from those about her the honours due to Royal blood. Walpole tells the story of her death-bed, how she concerned herself with the draperies of her funeral pomp, and how "she made her ladies vow to her that if she should lie senseless, they would not sit down in the room before she was dead." The Princess, like her husband, died at Buckingham House, and shared his grave in Westminster Abbey. And it was after her death—for there were no descendants left, and the dukedom was now extinct—that Buckingham House was sold to George the Third, with whom it was ever after a favourite residence. In 1775 the place was settled upon Queen Charlotte, in exchange for Somerset House, which had formerly been regarded as the Royal Dower-house, and, from that time, till the new Palace was built, it was generally known as the Queen's House.

It was at Buckingham House that King George was staying when the Gordon Riots occurred, and, while the mob had possession of St. James's Palace, the house was surrounded by several thousand troops, who bivouacked about the courts and gardens, and in St. James's Park. There was no straw for the men to sleep on, and none could be obtained for love or money. The King walked about among the soldiers and explained to them that, for the worth of his crown, he could not then get a load of straw; but he would share their watch, and all that there was in his cellars in the way of liquor should be served out to them. At Buckingham House, all George's children were born, except the future George the Fourth, who came into the world at St. James's Palace.

When George the Fourth came to the

throne he wanted little of three-score years; but he began to build on a scale as if he expected a long lease of sovereignty. As Thackeray sarcastically proposed to inscribe on his statue, among his other achievements, "He built the palaces of Brighton and of Buckingham." But although he built, yet he did not live to inhabit Buckingham Palace. As William the Fourth did not care for the place, the Palace remained practically an empty shell till Victoria came to the throne, when it was furnished for the reception of the new monarch.

As George the Fourth's architect, John Nash—who also built that curious structure known as the Pavilion at Brighton—left the Palace, it formed three sides of a square, with its principal front to the west; that is, with its back to St. James's Park; and overlooking the beautiful gardens and extensive lake that lie there secluded from the public eye. During the early part of the present reign the fourth side of the square was completed by building the present frontage to St. James's Park, an operation which added a great amount of space; but which cut off a considerable amount of light and made many of the corridors and apartments rather gloomy.

There are few places in London, in any way to be regarded as show places, so difficult to gain admission to as Buckingham Palace; and even if you have the entrée, and attend Courts and Drawing Rooms, your knowledge of the Palace will probably be confined to the chief State apartments. But the world in general is confined to a view of its outward aspect only; its iron gates and railings; the great desert of gravel in front; the façade crowned with figures of Saint George and Britannia armed with spear and trident. Then there is the long crescent-line of wall, surmounted by vases; the sentry-boxes below, with the Guards, in their tall bearskins, pacing up and down, with the tympanum of the riding-school peering above, and a bas-relief of Theseus—if it be Theseus, and prancing horses. Those sober red-brick buildings follow, the Royal Mews, with their gateway and clock turret—it still keeps good time, that clock, to which Government clerks, of a morning, cast inquiring glances, as they hurry by, none too soon, for their offices in Whitehall—and that brings us to Arabella Row. Dear old Arabella! there she is, prim and as old-fashioned as ever, among clubs, mansions, hotels, that are springing up all around;

and thence up Grosvenor Place, you still have on one hand a tall dead wall with trees showing above, and straggling shoots of ivy and creepers, and the dead wall you may follow into the whirl and bustle about Hyde Park Corner, and so down Constitution Hill till you reach the railings of Buckingham Palace once more. It is something of a walk, too, for it embraces forty acres of grounds and acres of water, all those stables for the Queen's horses and houses for the Queen's men, as well as the Queen's coaches—forty carriages, at least, besides the great gilded coach of State, and goodness knows how many horses; but the cream-coloured Hanoverians are among them, lovely in hue but small in size, which only appear with the State coach, and on State occasions.

Within this magic circle a quiet seclusion reigns; surrounded by the turmoil and traffic of London, here hardly a sound is heard. You may traverse endless corridors, innumerable rooms, vast halls and gilded chambers, and never meet a soul. It is like the enchanted palace in the heart of which sleeps a beautiful princess; and it is as well guarded, too, not by thorns and briars, but by the bayonets of Grenadiers, and, more effective still, by the vigilance of a strong body of police.

In approaching a palace everything depends on your degree. If a reigning Monarch, the big gates fly open, the guard turns out. A simple Prince must be content with one of the battants open, and a general salute. My Lord Duke enters at a side gate; but as for an ordinary mortal, the best thing he can do is to throw himself upon the mercy of the first policeman he sees.

"How am I to get into the Palace?"

"You might try the equerry's gate," is the reply.

The equerry's gate is big enough to admit a coach-and-four, and strong enough to resist anything short of artillery; but there is a wicket gate like that in "Pilgrim's Progress," and a huge hanging bell-handle, a tug at which does not produce the sonorous vibrations you might expect. But here is a servant in the Royal livery, with a policeman behind him, the latter of whom proves to be the leading spirit—the guiding spirit too, for he leads the way at once into the recesses of the Palace, dim, half-lighted regions, where huge pillars and buttresses appear that sustain the foundations of this mighty pile, with narrow corridors between, which seem to penetrate

into the very bowels of the earth. Then daylight breaks once more, and here we are in a little office—where? Who can say?—somewhere between Pimlico and Piccadilly.

But here at any rate is a gentleman, who with the Queen's permission has kindly undertaken to see us through the Palace; one who knows Palaces by heart—Buckingham, Osborne, Windsor, aye, and the old Pavilion, which was as well worth seeing as any of them; Holyrood, too, and saw no ghosts there—not pale Mary with her hair unbound, nor Rizzio with gaping wounds, nor evil Darnley, nor any of the fated House of Stewart—no, not one. "Besides, if I have," says our guide, with a twinkle of the eyes, "I am sworn to secrecy." Well, there are no evil memories about Buckingham Palace, everything belongs to our own period; memories there are tender and pathetic, but these belong to every dwelling-place where inmates have come and gone. Stay, there is one room, a handsome, dignified room, with columns, and the quiet, reposeful air of the last century—the kernel of the place as it were—a bit of old Buckingham House, enshrined in the vast new Palace; a room that has seen hoops, and powder, and patches, flowered sacques and embroidered waistcoats; but before reaching this we pass through gallery and corridor, and suites of handsome rooms, which would make a palace of themselves one might think. It is a Palace "en papillotes." Linen covers enclose all the costly furniture, pathways of drugget meander over the carpets; but there are the pictures, family portraits chiefly, and of domestic interest, and the cabinets, and the mirrors, and, above all, the china—yes, the Palace is strong in faience; here is old Chelsea in profusion, royal pieces delightful to the eyes of a connoisseur, but above, yes, in the halls above, there are treasures.

But that was the gallery of the elect which we saw just now, of those who have the "entrée" that is, Ambassadors, and Ministers, and high officials, who have an entrance to themselves and a separate staircase, so that they reach the presence free from the general crush, and by a "détour." We have reached a noble suite of rooms overlooking the terraces; the gardens, with trees now grey and leafless; the sward in its dull winter green; the lake that winds like a river between bosky glades. To see these grounds all grey and dull, in the winter haze, and yet with a soft melan-

choly calm about them, and contrast the scene they witnessed last June with gay barges on the lake, and gay costumes on the lawn, and everywhere groups of the highest and most distinguished in the land, whether in arms, or arts, or statesmanship, or birth, or wealth; yes, that was a sight such as the Palace could hardly have matched in the days when everybody was young and gay.

We may suppose, by the way, that the saloon in the centre of the garden front is the most charming room in the whole suite, where royalties might meet, in a stately manner of course, but in domestic rather than Royal state.

The State apartments invite us now, and here we come to something really Royal and magnificent. The "coup d'œil" of the grand marble staircase, with the galleries beyond, flanked with pictures, sculptures, and hangings; the noble Entrance Hall, with rows of massive marble columns; all this gives an impression of Royalty and State, and of the grandeur which encompasses the wearer of the ancient Crown of England. Taking the Ambassadors' Staircase, we come almost directly to the Throne Room. The unprivileged crowd who throng to the Royal Drawing Room, pass up the grand staircase, and, filing through various rooms and galleries, reach the presence by a more round-about way.

And in the Throne Room we have magnificence too; a noble room with emblazoned ceiling and alcove still more richly decorated, with massive crystal chandeliers, and a blaze of gold and colour. Too much gold, too much colour perhaps; and yet the whole is impressive, and, no doubt, for the ruler of an empire, Eastern as well as Western, a touch of barbaric glitter is allowable. But the Throne is a little disappointing. We think of the Peacock Throne of the Great Mogul, in which the Kohinoor glittered like a star among constellations of minor jewels, and we have imagined,

A throne of royal state, which far
Outshone the wealth of Ormos or of Ind.

Although perhaps the plain oaken chair, containing the stone of destiny, which is to be seen at Westminster Abbey, appeals more strongly to the imagination than one encrusted with gold and jewels.

Close by is the Royal Retiring Room, to which only members of the Royal Family are allowed to penetrate, a room richly decorated and hung with many of the smaller gems of the pictures in the Royal

collection. But following in reverse order, the route pursued by those who attend, or are first presented at Her Majesty's Drawing Room, we traverse a series of noble rooms, which have now a handsome congregation of chairs awaiting the flocks of fair dames, and fresh and often lovely "débutantes," their turn to reach the Royal presence; all in the richest costumes with jewels, feathers, and long trains, the latter tucked over the arms of the wearers of them, till the very last barrier is reached. There, besides the two gentlemen-at-arms, who guard the doorway, are stationed two pages of honour, whose duty it is to spread out the flowing trains, and speed their owners into the presence, with all their plumes fully displayed. But at each door previously encountered is erected a gilded iron barrier, where stand two gentlemen-at-arms who admit by a gate at each side, one at a time, right and left; and the struggle at the barriers is often a severe one. But for these precautions, it is believed that the loyal and distinguished crowd of fair women would sweep before them the whole array of Court officials, and pour, in a tumultuous tumbled mass, into the Royal presence.

These rooms are cleared of most of their ordinary belongings to make room for the coming influx to the Drawing Room. But there is one of these rooms, with rich cabinets and tall mirrors reaching from floor to ceiling, which boasts of a certain mystery. A spring is touched close to one of the cabinets, and the seemingly solid wall, cabinet, mirror, and all, swings gently forward, and reveals a double door sunk in a recess, which gives access to the Royal retiring rooms. Our cicerone has often had the conduct of distinguished Eastern guests on a tour round the Palace. Chinese Mandarins with the crystal button, Japanese Ambassadors, and others from the realms of Ind, and generally has had occasion to admire the complete stolidness and unconcern displayed by such visitors; not a gleam from the yellows of those almond eyes, not a movement of the unruffled faces, showed either interest or admiration. But here in the sudden revelation of this secret entrance, was something that "fetched" these solemn men of the East, and aroused their interest and admiration. Indifference became hearty appreciation, and yellow eyes twinkled and yellow faces relaxed in wonder and delight.

We had been promised the sight of

treasures in the way of "faience" in the upper rooms of the Palace, and assuredly the promise was fulfilled; of old Sèvres the collection is magnificent—cabinets, full of rare vases; and beautiful pieces displayed to best advantage, in connection with costly buffets and rare and delicate marqueterie. Much of the porcelain was collected by George the Fourth, who had certainly a princely taste for richness and magnificence, with a full appreciation of good artistic workmanship.

Of the same Monarch's providing, too, are some wonderful specimens of old Chinese porcelain, to be found in the more private apartments—among others two wonderful old "dragon" vases, once at the Brighton Pavilion, at sight of which Chinamen themselves lift up their hands and exclaim: "Nothing finer in our country."

The pictures we have hitherto seen, have been chiefly of the modern school, and connected with events in the history of the reign of Victoria. Louis Philippe appears with his intelligent bourgeois face; and Napoleon, with his beautiful Empress, our ally against Nicholas, who in his turn presents himself, haughty, stern, and powerful, the very type of a despot. There is a good portrait, too, of the Emperor William of Germany, taken in 1848, when, as Crown Prince, he came here in the midst of revolutionary troubles, bringing with him the Crown jewels of Prussia, to be kept safe from possible emergencies.

The Emperor's son, the Crown Prince—the present Emperor privately visited the Palace last year, and remarked this portrait of his father. Who, when this picture was painted, could have seen the career that lay before this already middle-aged man; the conquest over two great empires; the unification of the German race; that he should live to be the foremost man in all this world?

A lively picture of the last half century might be put together from the walls of Buckingham Palace. There are weddings, Royal festivals, visits exchanged with foreign Courts; there are broken warriors returning from Crimean battle-fields to be decorated and rewarded by Royal hands; a Royal progress through this vale of tears is here emblazoned in colours before our eyes.

But the picture-gallery itself contains a really fine collection, chiefly of the Dutch School, with many paintings of immense

value. Rubens is fairly represented; there are some wonderfully fine Rembrandts. His "Shipbuilder and his Wife" is there, painted in 1633, a noble specimen of his work; and the "Portrait of a Fair Woman"—fair in complexion that is, for she is not beautiful—in a rich dress, is of wonderful depth and finish.

Teniers, too, has a jolly ale-house scene, with a couple of rustic figurants, who seem almost to dance out of the canvas; with others of his best.

Paul Potter, Cuyp, Wouvermans, Van der Velde, Greuze, are all represented; and English art is shown by Reynolds—but not Reynolds at his best. There is a portrait of the King somewhere, by Reynolds; but that we missed.

In one of the State rooms there are full-length portraits, by Gainsborough, of King George and his Queen, but not at the artist's best; and one of his of a Princess, however—Duchess of Cambridge, surely—is full of grace and charm.

Then there is a pleasant little Wilkie Room, in which that master of genre painting is shown at his best in "Blind-man's Buff"—familiar to everybody in engravings—with other works not so important. And there are Winterhalter's portraits, which are also everywhere known from reproductions of all kinds.

Books of reference speak of a sculpture gallery in the Palace, but we did not see any. There are scattered works in bronze and marble, and, in a kind of alcove, two fine marble statues, by Gibson, of the Queen and Prince Consort; but the best of the Royal sculptures are, no doubt, at Windsor Castle.

A long day might be spent at the Palace, and ours was but a short one, and yet but a fragmentary impression would be retained of its treasures. What of the great Dining-room with its buffets loaded with gold plate! Ah! but you will not see the gold plate; all that securely reposes in some impregnable strong room, and only makes its appearance at State dinner parties. But the general impression will remain of a bewildering succession of innumerable grand apartments; of passing through crowds of folding doors, all yielding to the master-key of our conductor, but otherwise impenetrable. And the doors themselves deserve notice, those in the older part of the building especially: beautifully polished solid mahogany, of a colour! of a richness!! Such mahogany the richest millionaire in the world might sigh for in

vain. Trees such as produced that marvellous wood are now unknown, and hundreds of years would be required to produce their successors. But the mahogany we use now is but a pale shadow of the wood that was shaped and polished at the behest of the First Gentleman in Europe. Everywhere footsteps are muffled in the soft pile of the carpets; but this universal carpeting, although suitable enough for a winter palace, does not allow of the beautiful effects of the polished floors of Continental Palaces, the soft reflections and gleams of light, and the dim chiaroscuro. And the lights in the Palace are not good, except on the garden side; the somewhat gloomy central quadrangle, all shut in by heavy masonry, is certainly depressing. But at night, when the crystal chandeliers and the noble candelabra are gleaming with thousands of wax candles, with the great halls glowing with electric light, and powerful sunlights of gas shining from the lofty roofs, then with crowds of fair women with jewels and ravishing costumes, with lovely white shoulders and swan-like necks outshining all the rest, and brave men, and glittering uniforms, with the crash of music and the thrill of dancing feet, then can we fancy the Palace as indeed a scene of enchantment. And, after all, that is the kind of enchantment most people prefer to that of the Sleeping Beauty in a century of silence.

There is more to be described, no doubt. Perhaps we have said nothing about the Yellow Drawing-room, which an enthusiastic visitor may be forgiven for describing as heavenly. The South Drawing-room, too, may be admired. And then there is the finest sight of all—the State Ball-room, or Concert-hall, completed in 1856. It is used for both purposes, with an organ at one end, and what our ancestors would have called a singing gallery, which is supplemented on concert nights by a sufficient temporary orchestra, and at the other end the dais, where Royalties disport themselves on ball nights. This is a noble hall, well-proportioned, and admirable, as everybody says, in its acoustic properties, with its columns of porphyry, richly-carved ceiling, and elaborate ornamentation, and lighted both by incandescent electric lamps and sun-lights in the ceiling. Then there is the chapel, formerly a conservatory, but that has gone out of use—a small, domestic chapel, the roof supported by tall, gilt pillars, which came from the screen of Carlton House.

Besides the rooms of State and ceremony, the Palace contains a vast number of private apartments, consecrated to the use of the various members of the Royal Family. These rooms are arranged, each set with its own corridor—a prodigious length of corridor, too, which bears the name of the Royal personage it belongs to. Many of these more intimate apartments are charmingly furnished and decorated; there is a Breakfast-room, which may be called a reminiscence of the Pavilion, with China monsters, and jars, and vases, and lovely Chinese panels, and a Chinese ceiling, all which make us doubt whether the much-abused Pavilion was deserving of the sneers which have been lavished upon it—"the Prince's hideous house at Brighton," as Thackeray calls it. One little room, too, has a peculiar interest—it is the Waiting-room, where Ministers of State were wont to await their less public interviews with Majesty. Melbourne has sat here, Palmerston, and Russell, Robert Peel, Gladstone, no doubt. It is decorated in a not magnificent Italian style, with coloured panels, and is adorned with sets of miniatures of distinguished people of all times, as an encouragement, perhaps, to Prime Ministers to go and do likewise. There is the blotting book, with the Royal cypher, that great statesmen have idly scribbled in. Did any of them feel as nervous while awaiting the pleasure of their Royal mistress as other people feel as they wait in Ministers' antechambers? But it is long enough now since anybody waited there.

Strange to say, in our progress from end to end of the Palace, we have not met a single living soul; not a dog has barked, not a cat have we found sitting purring by the fire, not a bird has fluttered in its cage. Now and then a soft-toned clock chimes out hour or quarter from its case of porcelain or ormolu; fires are burning on marble hearths. Here has been a long silence, fitfully broken at times, but soon resuming its reign.

But if anybody has imagined, as might be imagined from the solitude in which it stands, that the Palace was in a half-dismantled, abandoned condition, let that person be undeceived. All is fresh, brilliant, well-cared-for; dust does not seem to settle, or it is expelled as soon as it appears; damp is vigorously warred against, although in the foggy, wintry days there is no keeping the all-penetrating haze out of the great halls and lofty

galleries. But that is an inconvenience inseparable from a London residence, and affects equally the occupier of a house of ten rooms as well as of a palace of a thousand.

And now our round is finished: we have seen everything that our very courteous and entertaining guide can show us, and it only remains to pass through the gloomy halls of Eblis beneath the buttresses and foundations, and so into the busy commonplace world that lies outside the gates of the Palace.

RED TOWERS.

By ELEANOR C. PRICE.

Author of "Gerald," "Alexia," etc., etc.

PART I.

CHAPTER XVII. A LETTER FROM CELIA.

EVERYONE expected more snow; but that night it did not come, and the next day was very much the same, with grey, thick clouds hanging low, and a creeping cold in the air which was not frost but winter in its saddest aspect and feeling.

Colonel Ward's sick room was, perhaps, the most cheerful place. He had slept at night, and all through the morning he was quite wide awake, and talked to Paul a great deal.

About twelve o'clock their talk was interrupted by Dr. Graves, and Paul left him with his patient. When the Doctor came downstairs the young Squire was walking about the garden in front, with a puzzled frown on his face.

Dick, jealous and unhappy at being shut out from his master, was lying on the doorstep; Jess was walking sedately after Paul; Punch and Judy were rolling over each other on the grass. When Dr. Graves came out these two rushed forward and jumped upon him. Dick looked at him fixedly with a low moan. Jess, as Paul stopped to speak to him, lay down and gazed into vacancy.

"Good dogs, good dogs—there, get along," said the Doctor. "Has Colonel Ward said anything to you about business, Mr. Romaine?"

"Business? Well, yes," said Paul, flushing a little as he looked at the Doctor, and wondered how much he knew. "He has been talking all the morning about his will. I wish he wouldn't."

"The sooner his mind is at rest the better."

"Why? You don't think him worse?"

"Not absolutely worse, no; but I am not easy about him. He had better see his lawyer, and get things settled. He is in a state of nervous excitement about this will of his. Do you understand? Not that he says much to me about it; but, if I were you, I should telegraph for Mr. Cole this afternoon."

"If he suggests it himself of course I must," said Paul. "But, you know, I must wait for that. From what he has been telling me I can't lift a finger to hurry things. I am awfully afraid he is going to do something wrong."

"Leave his money to you, do you mean?" said Dr. Graves, smiling.

"Part of it, and—look here, you know, he must have some relations somewhere, though he says he hasn't."

Dr. Graves was a thin, grey-haired, practical man, much weather-beaten, and not very cheerful, perhaps from his complete honesty. He was rather cynical in his views of humanity, but he liked Paul Romaine, and had liked his father, seeing in them a clear sincerity, which was the only quality he respected. Colonel Ward also shared his esteem for the same reason. As a rule, Dr. Graves hated women; he said he could not understand them.

"If I were you," said the Doctor, "I should safely trust the Colonel not to do anything unfair. He is a just man—honourable, like your father."

"Yes, but it's too much; if you only knew, Dr. Graves—"

"Don't tell me; I'm not curious, and I am in a great hurry. Colonel Ward is quite capable of managing his own affairs. For his sake, not for yours, I advise you to send that telegram."

The Doctor was gone. Paul loitered about with the dogs a few minutes longer, and then went back to the Colonel's room.

"Colonel," he said, sitting down beside him, "I've got something serious to say."

"Out with it; but I'm getting sleepy."

"If you really choose to do this for Celia, it is most awfully good of you. I don't see how we are ever to thank you—but—"

"Don't bother," said the Colonel, rather wearily. "Think of me sometimes when you think of your father, Paul. Poor Tom Darrell! I believe she was fond of him."

Paul felt all the more anxious at this strange, new gentleness. Lately, since he

had made friends with Celia, Colonel Ward had not mentioned her father at all. In old days nothing was too bad for him.

"I was going to say," said Paul, "why should you leave the rest to me! Now do think that over, will you? There can be no hurry."

"Yes, but there is," said the Colonel, more wakefully. "My memory's giving way. I wanted to tell you to telegraph to Cole at once. He will come down this afternoon, and the thing will be signed and done with. Then I shall be able to sleep quietly. Don't dispute. I can't stand it. Go away, there's a good fellow. Send the telegram, and take yourself off for the afternoon. Barty will look after me."

Barty's anxious face was already at the door, with something on a tray. Paul perceived that in truth the best and wisest thing was to take himself off, as the Colonel said. He went away to his own house; sent Ford off with the telegram to the lawyer; and after luncheon took his gun and went off into the woods with Dick and his own old retriever.

The fresh, keen air, and the sweet scent of the woods, cold and silent as they were, did Paul's spirits good. The dogs ran about and enjoyed themselves thoroughly, without showing much surprise at the conduct of their unpractical master, who let birds fly away from under his feet, and did not even pay them the attention of a random shot. Sometimes, when the humour took him, Paul could be rather a keen sportsman: his keeper respected him if his groom did not. But to-day he seemed to forget that he had a gun in his hand at all. He wandered on through intricate miles of wood, thinking how astonished Celia would be when she heard of the Colonel's intention. Of course Celia did not and could not care for money; but she cared very much for the things that money could bring. There would be hardly anything now which she could not have, if she chose. And then Paul thrust all these thoughts away with a sort of horror. After all, surely he had enough; and Celia, he knew, would agree with him in dreading the time when that legacy should come to her. People must of course make their wills; but a will was a ghastly thing at best; it had better be put aside and forgotten. Celia must know; he could not help telling her; but then the subject should never be mentioned again—not for years, he hoped—for it was very

hard to imagine what life would be without the faithful old friend who had been so much to him since his father died. And then Paul assured himself that the Colonel was better; that his good constitution would triumph, and he would live for years. If there was the slightest relapse, he determined to send for a London doctor to consult with Dr. Graves: anyhow, perhaps this would be a good thing to do; and busy with all these thoughts, he went tramping on through the oak-scrub and heather, while pheasants looked at him from branches of trees, and rabbits hardly took the trouble to hide in their holes, till Dick or the old black dog came scrambling through the underwood.

Paul took a long round, and, by the time he came back to Red Towers, the sun had set and twilight had fallen. It was almost dark in the thicker part of the woods. He came through the gate at the end of the garden and remembered a talk he had had with Celia standing in that very corner, before the trees were leafless and the garden flowerless, while the Virginia creeper, which covered part of the house, was still clustering thick and rich, in its beautiful brown and red, on the old red bricks. It was bare now; only the ivy remained, curling round corners and running up to the chimneys, with a deep-green mass below, where a whole congregation of birds would build their nests next spring. Mrs. Sabin had not yet shut the long range of windows, and the workmen's ladders and planks were lying about on the grass outside, where there was still a little snow.

There had been a peculiar sweetness about Celia that September day, the day after she arrived at Holm. She was good that day, as well as happy. Paul remembered how she had told him that she could be perfectly happy in the dear old house as it was, if he in the least disliked its being altered; as to the study, she would not have it touched for worlds.

Paul liked to remind himself of her words; she had said them, she had meant them, though, possibly, she might have forgotten them now. And, after that, she had talked to him very sweetly, with a deeper show of feeling than was usual with her, and then they had gone on into the yard together, and then Colonel Ward appeared and was conquered. Yes, she was the sweetest, dearest, best woman in the world; and the man to whom she had given herself had certainly no excuse for

any feeling but the most intense happiness. His life was going to be something beyond imagination; and in this bright future it now seemed impossible that the dear old Colonel would be absent. He and his dogs must come in at the gate as in old days. Paul and Celia, as they loitered about next summer in their garden full of roses, must surely see that little company advancing.

It was as if a sudden clash of joy-bells had broken in on Paul's melancholy mood; that wintry twilight garden might have been flooded with a miracle of sunshine. His eyes brightened, he pulled himself together, as the future gave him these dazzling glimpses of itself; he whistled to the dogs, and walked across the lawn with a light, quick step.

"Any sport, sir?" said Sabin, meeting him in the hall.

"No; I didn't try to hit anything," Paul said, laying his gun down. "Has there been any message from the Cottage this afternoon?"

"No, sir; but a gentleman's come down from London to see the Colonel, and I rather think he's there now. There's a letter for you, sir, on the study table."

Sabin smiled. He lingered a moment, looking after his young master as he went into the study. But then the door was shut, and there was no more to be seen.

It was a letter from Paris, from Celia. No wonder Paul had felt happy as he came near the house. So she had been writing to him yesterday when he was writing to her. She had not promised to write yesterday, but she had been better than her word; it was like Celia.

He threw himself into an arm-chair by the fire, and opened his letter. The first look that crossed his face and dimmed the smile away was one of complete bewilderment, for the letter had no beginning.

The beginning of Celia's letters was always "My dear Paul." He had remonstrated before now, and begged for something more; but she had laughed and said that she could not imagine anything more. As he did not seem satisfied she went on to explain, with laughing eyes:

"Mine—my dear! How can one say anything nicer than that? I despise 'dearest' and 'darling.' In fact, I think they are rather insulting, as if it was necessary to exaggerate. To me 'my dear' means infinitely more."

"So it does, when you say it like that,"

Paul was obliged to confess, and he never complained again.

But this letter from Paris had not even the plain beginning that Celia liked. There was something very mysterious about it altogether. Every word of it seemed more puzzling than the last, and, as Paul read on, and read to the end, his bewilderment became hopeless.

The letter was not dated, and this was the way it began:

"—I have put off writing to you, and you are calling me horrid and heartless; but who was it, I wonder, who kindly told me once that I was as cold as a fish, and as hard as a stone? And how can you expect anything from a person with such a character? At first, I thought I would not write to you at all, for it was stupid of you, as well as wrong, to write that letter to me; but I suppose silence is a worse punishment than you deserve, and there are other reasons. By the time you get this I hope I shall be married, or, at any rate, it will be too late for you to interfere. I told you before, and I tell you again, that I like my prospects very much. A fish is satisfied with plenty of water to swim in, and a stone has not the bother of being in love. A stone is lazy, too, I should think, and would not care to dig itself up and tear about the world for anybody. Don't you begin to see now what nonsense your letter was? I know, don't I, when I am well off? At the same time, hoping that we may never meet again, at least, till you have forgotten to be silly, and have married some more self-denying girl, I will confess that if I could be in love, it would be with you, and not with him. I don't mind telling you that, because you think you know it already, and I suppose you are not far wrong. My marriage, of course, has no love in it, but it is a very good thing for me. I like to be rich, I like to be comfortable, and I like to be spoiled. There is nothing good in me. Your wife, when you have been married to her a year or two, will have to be a very good woman indeed. The man I am going to marry will always worship me, and will not expect much in return. At the same time, if I were a braver woman, I suppose I might possibly throw him over, and marry you. But as things are, my dearest, no. Don't write to me again; it is too late, and we have done with each other for ever now. Yours always, CELIA."

Paul read this letter twice through, first quickly, then slowly, without the faintest

idea that it was meant for any one but him. Then he took up the envelope and looked at it vaguely: "Paul Romaine, Esq, Red Towers," and so on; that was all right: and he began to read the letter again. As he became more fully conscious that he did not understand a single word of it, there came over him a feeling of terrible oppression, a feeling of being stifled in a black fog; and then the thought flashed upon him that he was going out of his mind. He laid the letter down, got up from his chair and walked round the room two or three times; then he took down a book from the shelves. "If I am mad," he thought, "I shall not understand this." He stood still, and forced himself to read half a page, giving it his full attention; it was perfectly clear to him; and long afterwards, when that terrible evening had been left years behind, he remembered the book—it was Matthew Arnold's "Essays in Criticism,"—and could almost have said that half-page by heart. Then he went back to Celia's letter, and began to read it a fourth time, with a clear and resolute intention to understand every word of it, and to know the worst; for he still supposed that the letter was meant for him.

Understand it! But that was not so easy, with the strongest resolution and the clearest brain, for it was as full of mysteries as ever. Some great trouble was evidently wrapped up in it; but why, whatever she had done or meant to do, should Celia have put things in such an extraordinary way?

She had not put off writing to him; nothing had been further from his thoughts than to call her "horrid and heartless." As to those strange remarks about stones and fishes, he fancied he had heard her say something of the kind before; but could not very well remember what. His letter! Was that yesterday's letter? But she had not received it. And what in the world did she mean about her marriage, and about this other man, with whom she was not in love?

"Did I ever want her to be self-denying?" thought poor Paul. "And who could possibly worship her more than I do?"

Too late! Not write to her again! Done with each other for ever! The mystery was indeed too deep to be understood. And then to sign herself "Yours always," and to call him "my dearest," when she was bringing everything to an end in this overwhelming way! To be sure she had drawn her pen through that

"My dearest," lightly, as if by a casual after-thought of her own inconsistency; but still she had written it, and had left it there. Though she did not say so plainly, the whole letter seemed to imply that she was going to be married immediately to someone else; so immediately that Paul's writing to her would be of no use. And yet she seemed miserable, and she said plainly that she liked him best.

"I must go," said Paul. "The Colonel is certainly better. Can't I catch the night mail at Charing Cross? Anyhow, I'll try for it. Cole will surely be ready to go back by the 5.50, and Ford can drive us down in half-an-hour."

To Ford's great satisfaction he had been employed that autumn to buy a fast-trotting cob for the little dog-cart, and this animal did his twelve miles an hour easily.

Paul rang the bell, and Sabin appeared at the door that same moment with a message.

"Would you kindly step over to the Cottage, sir? Colonel Ward would be glad to see you. Did you ring, sir?" as Paul stared at him rather blankly.

"Tell Mrs. Sabin to pack my bag, will you? I may have to go away to-night. Tell Ford to have the cart ready. I shall want to catch the 5.50."

Having given his orders, the Squire went out, walking with long, hurried steps to the Cottage. Just outside the door he tumbled over Dick, who was waiting for him, and kicked him severely. The poor dog was too brave to cry out, but looked up for the kind words which ought to have followed. Paul strode on, however, without taking any notice of him, and Dick slunk after him disconsolate.

Sabin went back to his wife and feared that the master had had bad news from Paris.

"He was as jolly as you please when he first came in," said he; "but now his face is as white and his eyes like burning coals, so as you never saw the like. I hope his young lady ain't a quarrelling with him."

"And going off to-night! That do look serious," Mrs. Sabin agreed. "I shouldn't have believed he'd have left the Colonel, and him with one foot in the grave, as you may say."

"Well, it's a sing'lar thing," said Sabin.

Paul, meanwhile, with his letter in his pocket, arrived at the Cottage, and went upstairs to the Colonel's room. Dr. Graves met him in the passage and stopped him for a moment.

"You here again!" said Paul.

"I was passing on my way back, and thought I would look in," said the Doctor. "He is not quite so well—rather too much excited. I shall be glad when this will business is over and done with."

"Why the devil couldn't it have been left alone altogether?" said Paul, looking on the ground.

Dr. Graves glanced at him sharply.

"Well, he wants you," he said. "I shall wait downstairs for the present. I have got to witness the will, it seems, and I want to see him again afterwards."

The Doctor passed on. Paul stood still a moment outside the door, trying to collect his thoughts, and to feel like himself again. The sight of his dear old Colonel was more calming than anything else could have been.

He was lying propped up with pillows; his face was flushed, and looked drawn and weary; his voice sounded weak and strained. The room was full of bright fire and lamp-light; on the further side of the bed Mr. Cole, the lawyer—a very solemn and business-like personage—was writing at a table. Paul walked round and shook hands with him.

"Mr. Cole has raised a question, Paul, that you must answer," said Colonel Ward. "He asked me whether the legacy to Miss Celia Darrell was to be conditional on her marriage with you. After a moment's consideration I thought it was best to consult you."

The Colonel smiled as he looked at Paul. Mr. Cole also fixed his eyes on the young man, standing at the foot of the bed, with the slightest quiver of amusement about his grave mouth. To Paul only the question did not seem any matter of amusement. He stood there looking down; and if the Colonel's eyes had had their old brightness, the shadow that had fallen upon Paul would certainly not have escaped them. His look was dark and gloomy; he lifted his hand to his face as if to hide something, and stood slouching there, leaning the other hand on the bed-post.

"Conditional on her marriage with me?" he repeated, and he seemed to speak with a slight effort. "I don't quite understand."

"Yes, you do, my boy," said the Colonel impatiently. "You might die, or she might change her mind—I'm talking nonsense, of course. Now, I should wish her to have seventy thousand in any case; I only want to know if you agree with me. It is only a formality; it doesn't imply any doubt of your marriage coming off, you understand, Paul."

"Whether our marriage comes off or not it can make no difference, surely," said Paul; and Mr. Cole stared at him still more curiously than before.

Perhaps it crossed his mind that Miss Darrell, with seventy thousand pounds, might easily find a more cheerful mate than this dark-looking fellow.

"That is just what I think," said Colonel Ward. "Now go away, and we will finish this business. Ask the Doctor if he can wait half-an-hour."

Paul hesitated a moment; but he could say nothing about the 5.50 train, though it seemed to him as if the minutes were tearing on. Perhaps he might have to start off without telling the Colonel, or seeing him again. Was that possible?

Before joining Dr. Graves in the drawing-room he took out Celia's letter, and read it once more under the lamp in the hall. Any chance of understanding it seemed more remote than ever. He could recognise neither her nor himself; and that other man, "the man I am going to marry," was like some black spectre of an unknown creation.

He went into the drawing-room, and, for the next half hour tried to talk politics to Dr. Graves, who put down his abstraction to the account of Colonel Ward's will, and thought he was a very queer fellow.

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